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MULTIMEDIA ADVERTISING METHOD USING AN ACROSTIC PUZZLE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the use of an interactive acrostic puzzle as a means of promoting the sale of products and services over the Internet.

Description of Prior Art

While numerous interactive games of various sorts are accessible on the Internet and marketers use many inducements to attract potential customers, there is at present no initiative to combine these activities by incorporating information about products or services within such games themselves. As for acrostic puzzles on the World Wide Web, several small, independent puzzle creators have mounted a variety of these puzzles and software programs for creating them. The goal of this activity, however, is simply the entertainment of the player. At the same time, however, large corporations constantly announce contests and other advertising campaigns to attract customers. None of these combine an acrostic puzzle with an advertising campaign.

In the current state of affairs, these two computer applications areas – acrostics for amusement and online advertising – have no association. The Web sites offering acrostic puzzles can attract only the aficionados of this pastime. At the same time, advertising on the Web suffers from the reluctance of computer users to seek out voluntarily the promotional material offered on the Web except when they are specifically motivated to inform themselves about a particular product or service, as for example a new car or a vacation destination. When advertising executives speak of interactive advertising on the Internet, they almost always limit their thinking to encouraging the viewer to click on an icon that leads to a sale. The concept of drawing potential customers to the Web with a

pastime that can also reward them with such premiums as free travel, free books, or free admission to a golf course has not yet been developed.

In response to the perceived need for such a pastime, the present invention uniquely combines the interests of 50% of Internet users who play games with the already demonstrated attractiveness of contests and lotteries as marketing tools on the Web. It thus offers an unappreciated advantage over the current efforts to attract potential buyers to marketing Web sites. The acrostic puzzle on which this marketing method is based consists of a quotation from a book and a set of clues to suggest a pool of letters which are rearranged to form the quotation. In both these parts of the puzzle, the goal of the marketer can be introduced in interesting and appropriate ways. The quotation, to start with, can deal with the subject-matter of the product or service provided by the marketer, such as airline travel. Many of the clues can likewise deal with the same subject-matter, such as the cities to which the airline travels. As the player solves the puzzle, therefore, it reminds her/him of the corporate brand and its offerings. A major incentive to log onto the Web site containing a constantly renewed series of puzzles is the possibility of winning an attractive prize or increasing an account of rewards offered as part of a loyalty program by, for example, an airline or hotel chain.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with the present invention an interactive multimedia acrostic puzzle provides an innovative means to attract customers to a Web site in order to acquaint them with products or services.

Objects and Advantages

Multimedia acrostic puzzles based on a quotation from a book related to particular products or services can be expected to attract substantial numbers of players seeking prizes or increases in their rewards accounts in the loyalty programs of airlines or hotel chains. Such puzzles can be expected to engage players for a substantial period, during which time they can be informed about the features of products or services and encouraged to purchase them. Links to related products or services can readily be incorporated into the same computer screens that present the puzzles. Since these puzzles can be offered on a weekly or even daily basis, they can be expected to draw a growing number of participants during prolonged advertising campaigns, reflecting seasonal changes and even responding to shifting demographic patterns. One means of enlarging the audience is to provide a screen button “E-Mail This Puzzle to a Friend,” which would encourage a beneficent form of “viral dissemination.”

One example of such an advertising campaign would be a program by an airline or travel bureau to attract purchasers of packages including air travel, hotel accommodation and access to well-known golf courses. The quotation on which the puzzle is based could be drawn, for example, from a history of golf tournaments or the biography of a famous golf professional. Among the clues could be references to events or personalities in the golfing world, and some of the clues could hyperlink to visual images of such personalities or other golf-related images. Letter tiles from the letter tray moving to a

position in either the grid or the clues could appear to be carried by animated figures appropriate to the subject-matter of the puzzle, as for example, a cartoon golfer swinging.

Additional promotions can be affiliated with each puzzle. An online bookseller, for example, or the publisher of each book from which a quotation was taken could simultaneously promote the book itself. Marketers of golf gear, clothing, and mementos could also be associated through hyperlinks. Hotel chains that have established associations with airlines could offer points in their rewards programs for frequent guests. Additional marketing activity could be generated, for example, from a book publisher with a book of golf-related cartoons or a jeweler with a silver-plated putter.

A key feature of the present invention, found in only one of the existing online acrostic puzzles, which is designed only for amusement, is a system of assigning point values to each of the letters in the alphabet, in order that a total score may be recorded. The present invention is unique, however, in directly associating the player's score with a particular reward, such as frequent flyer miles, a discount on a purchase, or a free accommodation on an airline or at a resort. Players can be allowed to print out discount coupons on their own computers with bar codes to indicate the value of the discount offered. Players would be encouraged to log onto the puzzle site regularly to either increase their frequent flyer accounts or win one of the other current rewards. Marketers of frequent flyer programs and similar promotional activities can easily and frequently change the focus of

their advertising campaigns by mounting new puzzles in synchrony with their campaigns in other media, such as print and television.

Another feature of this invention, not found in any existing online puzzle, is a capacity for demographic specialization. A corporation interested, for example, in reaching an audience of African Americans (as Procter & Gamble has announced its intention to do) could commission puzzles based on quotations from black authors and dealing with topics of special interest to black individuals. Among the clues could be references to black athletes, statesmen and -women, entertainers, and other public figures. These could be represented by visual images. Similar advantages exist for addressing such market segments as women, Asian Americans, or Hispanics.

In the future, the present invention can also become the basis for interactive television game shows. While interactive television in this country has not yet reached the status it has achieved elsewhere, particularly in Great Britain, a vigorous activity is marked by such milestones as the recent establishment in the U.S. of an Emmy award for this type of production. This award has "attracted 48 entries from every major broadcast and cable network." When interactive television entertainment becomes widespread in the United States, the present invention can be modified to allow not only competition among studio contestants but also the simultaneous participation of the entire viewing audience, with the highest scorer among that audience represented by a silhouette on the television screen. Such a mode of presentation could become a major component of corporate advertising campaigns.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 shows the opening screen of a puzzle in an alternate embodiment as it would appear on a personal digital assistant (PDA):or similar device.

Figure 2 shows the opening screen enlarged.

Figure 3 shows that the player then has selected the appropriate letter (M) 4.

Figure 4 shows an entire word (MAMBO) entered by a player into the clues 2 with its letters appearing in their appropriate positions in the grid 1. The score (12) 5 calculated by the program for those letters appears.

Figure 5 shows the letter S has been selected by the player from the letter tray 4.

Figure 6 shows another entire word (SUNTAN) entered by a player into the clues 2 with its letters appearing in their appropriate positions in the grid. The score 5 has been increased by the program to 19 to account for those letters.

Figure 7 shows how when the "Letter Hint" button 7 has been pressed, the letter R is supplied by the program, in both the clues and its corresponding position in the grid; the score has been reduced by two points to 17.

Figure 8 shows the remaining letters of the word RUST entered by the player into the clues 2 with those letters appearing in their appropriate positions in the grid 1. The score 5 has been increased to 23 to account for those letters.

Figure 9 shows letters (E, L, M, I, D) entered into the grid 1 by the player and their corresponding appearance in the clues 2. Since letters entered into the grid 1 by the player are worth double points, the score 5 has been increased to 59 to account for those letters.

Figure 10 shows E, O, and N entered by a player so that the initial letters of the clue words 3, when read vertically, reveal the author of the quotation (EMERSON); the score 5 has been increased to 63.

Figure 11 shows how when the first word in the grid 1 is selected and the “Word Hint” button 6 has been pressed the word WHOSO is entered into the grid 1 by the program and its letters appear in their corresponding positions in the clue words 3. Since letters entered into the grid 1 are worth double points, and the values of letters entered by the program are deducted from the player’s score 5, the score has been lowered to 31.

Figure 12 shows the puzzle completed with the clues 2 all filled in and the quotation revealed. (Since the score may be based in some measure on direct entries into the grid 1, which are worth twice the value of those entered into the clues 2, the score 5 shown here is approximate.)

Figure 13 shows the puzzle as it would appear in an alternate embodiment on a television screen when being played as a television game show. The faces of the contestants (three in this instance) appear next to their scores. The point values of the individual letters in the letter tray 4 are set at an initial value. This value may be increased by any factor as successive iterations of the game are played, or even in response to actions by individual players as the game progresses.

Figure 14 shows a clue word 3 selected by the program and highlighted. The corresponding squares in the grid 1 are highlighted in the grid 1.

Figure 15 shows a word (MAMBO) with letters entered by each of the players. Their scores 5 are increased appropriately.

Figure 16 shows another clue word 2 selected with the squares highlighted to correspond to their positions in the grid 1.

Figure 17 shows players adding letters 4 to the clue word 2 (SUNTAN), and their scores 5 increasing.

Figure 18 shows another clue word 2 selected with the corresponding squares highlighted in the grid 1.

Figure 19 shows the remaining letters of RUST entered and the scores of the players increased.

Figure 20 shows letters entered into the grid 1 and their appearance in the corresponding squares in the clues 2. Since letters entered in the grid 1 are worth twice their basic point values 4, the players' scores are raised appropriately.

Figure 21 shows the missing initial letters of the clues supplied to complete the author's name (EMERSON) when read vertically. These letters appear in their appropriate positions in the grid 1.

Figure 22 shows the puzzle completed with the clues 2 all filled in and the quotation revealed in the grid 1. (Since the scores may be based in some measure on entries directly into the grid, which are worth twice the value of those entered into the clues, the score shown here is approximate.)

Fig. 23 shows a typical puzzle as it would appear in the preferred embodiment on a personal computer or similar device.

Fig. 24 shows the puzzle area enlarged.

Fig. 25 shows a clue 2 selected by placing the pointer over the bullet before the clue 2. The associated squares are highlighted.

Fig. 26 shows the first box in the selected clue word selected. The animated icon 12 is positioned over the letter H.

Figure 27 shows the Letter H inserted into the clue box 2 and the letter H selected. The associated icon (in this instance a golfer) appears over the selected letter in the letter tiles tray 4, and the same letter appears in its appropriate position in the grid.

Fig. 28 shows the remainder of the clue letters inserted into the clue boxes 2; they appear in the appropriate boxes in the grid 1. The animated icon 12 changes to indicate that the letter has been entered into the grid 1. The score 5 is raised to 17.

Fig. 29 shows a grid 1 square selected and the letter N selected 4.. The associated icon appears over the selected letter in the letter tiles tray 4, and the same letter appears in its appropriate position in the grid 1.

Fig. 30 shows the remainder of the grid 1 word entered as KNOW. The letter N adds 2 points to the score (double the letter's basic value of 1 because it was entered directly into the grid), but the word is wrong. The incorrect O and W (indicated by the color changing to red) subtract double their value ($1+3 \times 2=8$). The score is now 11.

Figure 31 shows the square in the grid 1 containing the letter O being selected and the replacement letter E in the letter tray 4 selected. The associated icon appears over the

selected letter in the letter tiles tray 4, and the same letter appears in its appropriate position in the grid.

Figure 32 shows the incorrect letters O and W replaced by the correct letters E and E. The score is adjusted to 15 ($1 \times 2 = 2 \times 2 = 4$). The associated icon appears over the selected letter in the letter tiles tray 4, and the same letter appears in its appropriate position in the grid.

Fig. 33 shows an alternative method of presenting a clue 3 as a visual image. Clicking the button in the clue words 3 brings up an image 11 (in this instance, the golfer Gary Player). The name of the golfer in the visual image has been inserted by the player into the clue boxes 3. These letters appear in the grid 1 and the score is raised to 33 ($14 + 19$ points for GARY PLAYER).

Figure 35 shows the puzzle completed with all the clue words entered and the quotation completed. A “starburst” 13 announces the player’s prize or award. A button “Print Coupon” 12 allows the player to print out a bar-coded coupon to facilitate receipt of the prize or award.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Figs. 23-34—Preferred Embodiment

A preferred embodiment of the puzzle is presented in Fig. 23. The puzzle comprises a grid 1 with black squares separating groups of open squares into which letters are inserted to construct the quotation which is the goal of the puzzle; a list of clue words 3 alongside boxes into which letters are inserted to construct the words suggested by the clues; a counter for the score 5; a button “Letter Hint” 7; a button “Word Hint” 6; a button “More About This Book” (optional) 8; a tray of tiles containing the letters of the alphabet with point scores 4.

Figs. 1-12—Alternative Embodiment

An alternative embodiment is presented in Figs. 1-12. The puzzle has been shortened to fit on the screen of a personal digital assistant or similar device. Another alternative is represented in Figs. 13-22 which show how the puzzle could be adapted as a quiz show on television.

Advantages

From the description above, a number of advantages for my Multimedia Advertising Method Using an Acrostic Puzzle become evident:

- (a) The puzzle is attractive to the 50% of Internet users who regularly play interactive games. It can thus become an important means of drawing potential customers to marketing Web sites and thereby of generating customer loyalty to sponsoring brands.
- (b) The puzzle is designed to attract growing numbers of persons interested in a particular activity, such as the game of golf. Such individuals will constitute a market for services and products associated with those activities, such as hotel accommodations near golf courses, attendance at golf tournaments, gear and clothing designed for that activity, and books and mementos relating to golf.
- (c) The method of scoring points can be related to various customer loyalty programs, such as frequent flyer miles, points toward free hotel accommodation or points for bidding at auctions.
- (d) The option to replace verbal clues with visual ones allows for a wide range of promotional views, including those of resort hotels, cruise destinations, famous and distinctive holes on golf courses, and portraits of celebrities whose published biographies are for sale. Furthermore, animations that appear to move the letter

tiles on the screen can add to the visual attractiveness of the puzzle, as well as enhance the association with particular products and services. Cartoon characters associated with Warner Brothers or Disney, for example, can assist in establishing associations with their travel, entertainment or recreation divisions.

- (e) The provision of a button “E-Mail This Puzzle to a Friend” facilitates the growth of the community participating regularly in the competition to achieve the highest score and the attendant rewards.
- (f) The option to solve the puzzle on personal digital assistants and similar devices allows players to access it from the many wireless access points being established on airplanes and in hotels, airports, coffee shops and other locations.

Operation

The operation of solving the puzzle relies on the technologies already available on the appropriate devices, namely a mouse pointer on computers and a stylus on handheld devices. On either of these devices, the player selects a square, usually among the clues 3, and then selects from the alphabet tiles 4 the letter judged appropriate. The same letter appears simultaneously in the corresponding square, usually in the grid 1. When a sufficient number of letters have appeared in the grid 1, the player can begin to see how some of these letters suggest words in the quotation and can enter the missing letters. If these are correct, the score 5 is increased by double the value of the letters thus entered. If they are incorrect, they appear in red and double their value is deducted from the score.

As an aid to solving the puzzle, the initial letters of the clue words, read vertically, spell the author and title of the work from which the quotation is taken. (In the shorter version on personal digital assistants, only the author's name appears.) As the name of the author begins to appear, the player can supply the missing letters and earn additional points as well as gain hints as to the clue words.

At the option of the puzzle constructor, some of the clues may be provided as visual rather than verbal clues. This option can be implemented by replacing a verbal clue with a clue button 10 which reveals an image 11. This option allows for such

marketing advantages as projecting views of destinations for cruises and golfing packages at hotels, of celebrities associated with either the services or the products of the sponsor or the interests of the demographic community toward which the marketing effort is directed. For example, if the target audience is African Americans, some of the clues can be portraits of celebrated black figures.

The screen containing the puzzle can allow such phrases as “You Have Just Won 437 Frequent Flyer Miles” or “You Have Won an All-Expense Weekend for Your Foursome at Torrey Pines,” corresponding to the score registered for each play.

Conclusion, Ramifications and Scope

Thus it is apparent that this Multimedia Advertising Method Using an Acrostic Puzzle can markedly improve the sale of a wide range of products and services to audiences participating through land-line computer networks, television networks, or wireless access points. It can be adapted to the needs of individual advertisers seeking means to reach audiences targeted by gender, ethnicity, or special interests. For example, marketers of art reproductions and other museum-related objects can design acrostic puzzles based on quotations from art histories, biographies of artists or novels about artists, including clues (both verbal and visual) referring to artists, art media, reproductions of art works and scenes recorded by artists (such as the scenes painted by Van Gogh). Prizes can be free copies of art works, free subscriptions to art magazines, or free admission to special exhibits.

Another marketing area where the Multimedia Advertising Method Using an Acrostic Puzzle would attract substantial numbers of new customers is the travel and hospitality industry. Advantage can be taken of existing cooperative arrangements to combine travel, accommodation and entertainment for the benefit of all. For the city of Las Vegas, for example, a single series of acrostic puzzles could feature quotations from biographies of celebrity entertainers who have performed there. Clues (including visuals) could refer to hotels and other tourist facilities, such as the Cirque du Soleil. Sponsors of the puzzles on a Web site could include these establishments as well as the airlines that serve the city

and even the Chamber of Commerce. Similar promotions can be created for cruises, with visuals presenting their ports of call.

A major attraction of this form of advertising is that these acrostic puzzles would fit very naturally among those offered by major Internet services, such as America Online and Yahoo. These services presently provide a wide range of puzzles including many based on word manipulation or searching. Advertisers could easily introduce an acrostic puzzle with such a slogan as “Play Golfcrostics and Win a Free All-Expense Week for Your Foursome at Pebble Beach!” The Internet services are known to be seeking additional advertising revenue and the advertisers are still seeking more effective ways to capitalize on the growing number of homes equipped with computers. The rapidly increasing availability of wireless access points in locations where people spend time – waiting at airports, staying at hotels on business trips, relaxing in coffee shops – similarly provides many opportunities to attract them to win valuable prizes or add to their loyalty program accounts.

Although the above description contains many specifications, these should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention but as merely illustrating the scope of the presently preferred embodiments of the invention. Thus the scope of the invention should be determined by the appended claims and their legal equivalents, rather than by the examples given.